

RAILROADING

Glossary

Ballast	material placed under a track to provide good drainage and to stop plant material from growing
Baggage car	carried the baggage for the passenger onboard the train
Baggage handler	a person who ticketed the baggage, giving the passenger a duplicate number and then taking the baggage to the baggage car
Beat her on the back	to run a locomotive fast and hard, "Lay the hickory to her"
Bend the rail	to throw a switch, bend the iron
Bleed	to drain all the air out of the brakes on a car
Boomer	a drifter, working several railroads during his life
Blue flag	a signal which indicates that no car or locomotives can leave or come onto a certain track until the flag is removed by the person who put it there
Box car	a rectangular car that carried food, etc.
Brakeman	the person who had the dangerous job of stopping the train
Branch	a feeder line to the main line, usually light track and small trains
Bumper	anything to stop a car from rolling off the end of a track
Caboose	a car usually at the rear of the train; the office and the home for the conductor and his crew while working a freight train
Car toad	a car inspector, derived from the squatting position to see under the cars
Chain gang	the men working extra trains over a certain portion of a division
Club	a stick the size of a baseball bat used to help turn the brake wheel on a hand brake



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Conductor	the person in charge of the train who communicates with the engineer, takes care of the tickets, and keeps the paperwork for the train
Cornfield meet	a head-on wreck
Coupler	a device located on both ends of an engine or railway car to connect each car piece together
Cowcatcher	the device on the front of a locomotive used to move debris from the tracks in front of the train
Current	the normal direction of traffic on a multitrack main line
Deadhead	a car without passengers, or car carrying off duty train crews
Derailment	when the wheels of a locomotive or car slide off the rails
Diesel locomotive	the type of locomotive that replaced steam engines and was powered by diesel fuel
Engineer	the person in charge of operating the engine
Fireman	the person who worked for the engineer, shoveling coal into the fire-box to provide fuel and steam pressure so that the engineer could run the train.
Flagman	the person who uses different colored flags to signal directions to the trains engineer or conductor
Flimsy	a train order, so-called because it is printed on lightweight paper
Freight	the goods carried by the trains from one point to another
Gandy dancers	track workers who repair, replace, and inspect the <i>tracks</i>
Green flag	a flag used by the yardman to tell the engineer to move the train forward, backward, or to stop
Hayburner	a coal/oil lamp



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High ball	to move ahead, take off, all clear to move the train down the tracks
Hobo	a person who rode the trains illegally, going from town to town seeking work, very much like today's migrant workers
Hold 'em	an emergency command meaning to stop
Homeguard	a person who works in the same yard or same division all his life.
Hot box	an overheated axle bearing
Immigrant	a person who came from another country to America
Join the birds	to jump off the train
Marker	the red light at the end of the train to protect the train
Master mechanic	the men who fixed the locomotives often in the middle of the night with only the light of kerosene torches
Milepost	a concrete marker near the tracks that shows how many miles the train has traveled
Mud hop	a clerk who walks between the tracks to check the cars in the yard
News butch	the job of selling peanuts, popcorn, candy, soda, chewing gum, cigars, and the latest papers on the train
Nomenclature	a system of naming the vocabulary of an occupation, science, etc.
Passenger	a person riding a train
Porter	the person who worked in the Pullman cars preparing beds, handling baggage, cleaning cars, and pampering passengers
Pull the pin	to uncouple car (or cars)
Red flag	the flag used by the yardman to tell the engineer to stop the train or indicate danger ahead or behind



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Roundhouse	a round building with stalls where quick adjustments and inspections were made to steam locomotives
Snake	a switchman; derived from the large “S” in the middle of their union buttons
Spike	a steel nail with a flat cutting point used to secure a rail into place
Station master	the person who sold tickets, handled the baggage, directed the loading and unloading of cargoes, and often used the telegraph to send messages to the train’s conductors and engineer
Steam locomotive	a steam-powered train engine that burned wood or coal
Tallow pot	an old term for the fireman
Track walker	a person responsible for walking several miles of track to ensure it was safe and free of debris
Turntable	a structure, usually wooden, with a set of tracks on top of it. It was a bridge across a round pit. The turntable would line up with a set of tracks anywhere on the circle. This was the best way to turn a locomotive around or place it into any of the roundhouse stalls.
Yard engine	a small engine used to move cars around in the railway yards

